

PM Hosea 14:1-9 The Pursuit of Wisdom

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- [0 : 00] If we were to have a specific text for tonight, it would be the very last verse of Hosea 14. Whoever is wise, let him understand these things.
- Whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.
- Well, my childhood, now I look back on it from some distance, was a rich and blessed one. Especially my experiences of Easter Ross, where my paternal grandparents lived. They lived in relative poverty, as far as this world's goods were concerned.
- They had no such thing as a bank account. But they were rich in love and grace. And I was prompted to think about all that again recently as I read the book of Hosea.
- [1 : 05] And particularly the start of the concluding verse. The question is asked, who is wise? And my granny's words came back to my mind about quite a number of the more, shall we say, eccentric people of the village.
- He's no wise, that one, she would say. And the implication was that certain individuals were perhaps lacking in common sense or gumption. But just before we try to understand the ending of Hosea's prophecy and his who is wise question, let's try to define wise.
- Now if we play that word association game, beloved of psychologists, where you say the first thing that comes into your head when a trigger word is mentioned, our knee-jerk response to wise might be, three wise men or even Solomon.
- But what was wise about travelling hundreds or even thousands of miles through bandit country, following a star of all things, to give expensive gifts to a baby whose parents clearly were on the breadline?
- Or what was wise about someone who took hundreds and hundreds of wives and was spiritually corrupted by them?
- [2 : 44] Our dictionaries would define wise as having or showing the ability to make good judgments based on a deep understanding and experience of life.
- I'll do that again. Wise is having or showing the ability to make good judgments based on a deep understanding and experience of life.
- Well, clearly, even in that definition, having wisdom and applying wisdom are two entirely different phenomena.
- In the case of the wise men, the less wise of their age and their time failed to understand their God-given wisdom. And for Solomon, the wisdom had become detached, an abstraction to be applied to others maybe, but without personal application before God.
- So where does the Bible, God's own word and revelation to us, consider wisdom comes from? Or indeed, what is it? Well, it goes back to Eden, doesn't it?
- [4 : 02] In Genesis 3, we have the first mention of wisdom and being wise. So let's read it together. Genesis 3, Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

[5 : 22] So wisdom's the capacity to discern, as does our heavenly Father, what is good and what is evil.

Unfortunately, being flawed, fallen and disobedient as we are, wisdom does not confer on us at all the inevitability of choosing the good over the evil.

In fact, our fallenness ensures that while we may occasionally show flashes of our being made in God, our Father's own image, more often than not we choose what satisfies the God we've placed on the throne of our own hearts in place of Almighty God, the God that is self, the me God, pride.

But yet, the Bible tells us there's wisdom there for the asking. If we realize our lack of it, we ask God for it.

James 1.5 tells us, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

[6 : 38] But this is God-centered, something we crave in godly fear. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. All those who practice it have a good understanding, Psalm 111.

And this is the wisdom in the secret heart. Psalm 51, verse 6. It's based on God's law, his statutes, his testimony in Scripture.

The law of the Lord is perfect. His testimony is wise, reviving. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. Psalm 19. And indeed, as we understand more of this wisdom, we find it's not just a concept, or a virtue, or a grace even, but wisdom is a person.

Christ Jesus himself is declared by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1.24 to be the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[7 : 54] A little later in that chapter, he says, And because of God, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

So this heavenly wisdom, this knowledge of the person of wisdom, the Lord Jesus Christ, is quite distinctly different from the world's wisdom.

The world's wisdom starts off with self and investigates every permutation and combination of self. 1 Corinthians 1 again, for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God, for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the worldly wise, and the discernment of the discerning, the worldly discerning, I will thwart.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

[9 : 29] For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. So, being truly wise is being Christ-like.

having the wisdom that discerns good from evil and wittingly chooses good as the Spirit of Christ Jesus lives in us.

This doesn't mean that wise judgments may not be made from time to time by those who do not know Jesus, because all men have been made in the image of God, however corrupted they may have become through sin.

But as James says, true wisdom, the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

[10 : 46] So, with the idea in our minds that true wisdom, godly wisdom, is not self-serving but God-serving and it isn't cleverest man-like but God-like wisdom.

Let's turn to the ending of the prophecy of Hosea. Fascinating, isn't it, the book of Hosea finishes in a way very similar to the ending of that magnificent psalm of part of which we read and sang together Psalm 107.

Hosea asks if we are wise and discerning. The psalmist, on the other hand, gesticulates his conclusions. Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord.

Come to think of it, Jeremiah asks a similar question in chapter 9 of Jeremiah verse 12. What man is wise? What man is wise enough to understand this?

He says, who has been instructed by the Lord and can explain it? Now, when the same message is given to us multiple times in Scripture, the same questions asked, maybe we should take careful note for assuredly we've got something to learn here.

[12 : 12] Now, those three very similar questions were asked in relation to different episodes in the history of God's chosen people, Israel, his covenant people.

If you'll bear with me, I'd like to do a quick resume of that history and then place the questions, the same questions, in their, each in their context.

So, 1,000 years before our Lord came in the flesh, Israel under the rule of King David and for a while King Solomon was undoubtedly the superpower of the Middle East.

Israel basically controlled from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. David walked closely with God despite his flaws and many failings.

He was truly penitent and brought to God the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart. And God blessed him and his reign as, in that reign, God's worship was front, right and centre in his kingdom.

[13 : 24] Solomon started well and he was the wisest fallen man who ever lived. But he was deeply flawed and he was led astray from worship of God by his plethora of wives.

And that wandering from God accompanied by the harsh levying of punitive taxes undermined the stability of his kingdom.

And when Solomon's son Rehoboam, despite wise advice from mature counsellors, went even further with higher and more vicious taxes, his love of money was the source of all kinds of evil.

Civil war ensued, the kingdom, the country broke into two nations, the northern kingdom of ten tribes with its capital in Samaria and the southern kingdom of Judah, capital Jerusalem.

And they went their separate ways. And while there were occasional alliances against other enemies, they were more often than not at loggerheads with each other. But they did continue to enjoy some economic prosperity over the three or four hundred years from a thousand BC onwards.

[14 : 41] But spiritually, they were both in a tailspin of disobedience to God, of idolatry and all sorts of depraved behaviour up to and including child sacrifice.

The northern kingdom went downhill more rapidly and with greater rebellion from God's laws than did Judah. But both basically followed the same pattern.

Now these were still God's chosen people. His covenant people. And in his grace and justice and love, God was dealing with them time and time and time again.

He pardoned, he taught, he cajoled, he pled. And these fallen people, they didn't listen. Any signs of repentance the Lord encouraged, any turning back to him led to blessing.

And that's where the prophets, major and minor, came into their own, not so much foretelling what would happen in the future if there was no true repentance, though they sometimes did do that with supernatural accuracy and precision.

[16 : 01] But their main function was the forth telling of God's message for a particular people at a particular time. That didn't win them too many friends as you can imagine.

Darkness loves darkness and light is hated and is anathema to those wallowing contentedly in the darkness of their sin. the stage was reached where judgment, just judgment and punishment for sin became inevitable.

And it happened first to the northern kingdom, annihilated by Assyria. Samaria was utterly destroyed in 722 BC by Sennacherib and his troops, most of the people were killed, a few fled to Egypt and the rest were exiled, scattered throughout the Assyrian kingdom.

Now you would have thought, wouldn't you, that Judah would have seen this disastrous judgment falling in Samaria and would have repented in sackcloth and ashes, but not so.

The prophet Micah shows us Judah casting sideways glances to Israel's fallen condition and saying, this will never happen to us, there will be no storm flooring, we are the people.

[17 : 24] Well, there were a few temporary revivals and some better kings sought out God's favour and they were spared for a while, but the bad behaviour prevailed and Judah as predicted by Micah and Isaiah and Jeremiah were exiled to Babylon in three tranches, in three waves, 605 BC, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, off to Babylon and the creme de la creme of society was taken away.

Then in 597 BC, all the skilled workers including a young priest called Ezekiel exiled to Babylon. Then in 586 BC, anybody who was able to do a decent job at anything was taken to Babylon and Jerusalem fell, it was reduced to rubble, the walls broken down, it was burnt, it was annihilated, razed to the ground.

But as the prophets had predicted under God's guidance, when 70 years of exile were completed, God moved the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to restore the Jews, to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

Under Zerubbabel, they returned in 538 BC, but the progress was very slow, and to cut a long and very painful story short, it took another 80 years before Ezra returned and kick started the rebuild spiritually, and then Nehemiah, 20 odd years later, again was responsible for rebuilding and securing the walls of Jerusalem.

This takes us to about 400 BC, 600 years of mayhem. Now, our three who is wise questions were posed, one in the 700s by Hosea, one around 600 by Jeremiah, and one by the returning exiles in Psalm 107, maybe 150 years later.

[19 : 26] But it's the same question. It's the same plea to learn from history, to realise the nature of fallen man is the same in all generations.

Adams, Cain's, Noah's, Abram's, Moses, Joshua's, Samuel's, David's, Solomon's, Hosea's, Jeremiah's, Ezra's, and every generation since the Lord Jesus came in the flesh.

We're still at it. Assuredly, mankind is still at it. Hosea's ministry was to the northern tribes in the same time frame roughly as Isaiah and Micah were prophesying to Judah.

Hosea's plea was from the heart, and his prophecy has the presentation of God's coming judgment and overtures of God's love and mercy in equal measure.

So, what does Hosea have to say to his own people? And to us, well, you and I may spend quite a bit of time looking for God's will and purposes in our lives, and the lives of those we love.

[20 : 39] where should I live? What should I do? Whom should I marry? These are some of the commonest questions. But when we're convicted that God is speaking into our lives and giving clear instructions, how do we respond?

Do we simply want God to ratify what we want to do ourselves? A sort of please send me a wife and make sure it's genie attitude? That's a prospectus rooted in the depth of our own wisdom, and will get us nowhere.

If we don't like the message, do we turn a deaf ear? Like Jonah, who didn't like at all the thought of having to preach in Nineveh, the heart of the Assyrian Empire, it was Israel's enemies after all, and so he caught the first boat to the Costa del disobedience at the other end of the Mediterranean.

Now, Hosea, by contrast, Hosea's name means salvation. It's from the same Hebrew root that Joshua and Jesus are derived.

Hosea is, to my mind, a hero of faithfulness, of diligent obedience, and boldness in listening and serving God and his word.

[21 : 58] At the start of Hosea, chapter 1, verse 1, it says, the word of the Lord that came to Hosea. Chapter 1, verse 2, when the Lord, that is the covenant Lord, the name for God used throughout the book, when the covenant Lord began to speak through Hosea, well, this is where we need to fasten our seatbelts, I'm afraid, because when God answers the marriage question, which may have been in young Hosea's mind, among others, he doesn't initiate that harp playing, nightingales singing, white dress, long train flowing till death as to part, happy ever after process, God tells Hosea to deliberately choose and marry a prostitute.

And not just a prostitute, but someone whose promiscuity would continue during the marriage, so that the three children born to Gomer, Hosea's wife, called Jezreel, Loruhamah, and Loami, were actually of uncertain parentage.

How sensitivities might be bristling at talk like this? Well, I'm quite sure that what Hosea did was the talk of the steamy, or the Samaritan equivalent of that, and his relatives must have been mortified.

But here, Hosea faithfully obeys God's instruction, not without much heart searching, I'm sure, but faithfully enters heartache of immense proportions as he wittingly marries someone who will remain unfaithful.

In chapter 2, verse 8 of Hosea, Hosea is even to provide for her, even when she's taken up with someone else and is probably laughing up her sleeve as she and the other man sacrificed to Baal and other false gods at Hosea's expense.

[23 : 59] But then Gomer seems to have been jettisoned by her latest lover, falls into paid prostitution such that Hosea buys her back, keeps her at arm's length until she proves her newfound faithfulness, and then lives with her again as husband and wife.

Pardon me, this is the Bible. You and I wouldn't dare to conjure up or write a love story like that.

But this is God's word. And just like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel acted out strange to us behaviors recorded in their prophecies to drive home a message from God.

This whole nightmare which Hosea suffers is intended by God as a powerful, very public message to idolatrous Israel and to us now.

Gomer represented Israel. Gomer was Israel. Gomer is you and me. Now hold hold on a minute.

[25 : 16] You might say, I'm no prostitute. In that very restricted sense, I'm sure neither you nor I are. Though if you read Matthew chapter 5 and accept the words from the mouth of the Lord Jesus himself, that what we actually think in our hearts matters to God as much as what we do with our hands, whether that is in whom or what we worship or covet or hate or love or desire, read it for yourselves.

There is none righteous, no, not one. See, this, this here is the greatest love story ever told.

God loves us. He loves us so, so much and from his heart of compassion he chooses his covenant people whom he loves, his spiritual Israel, he loves them so, so much he cannot help himself and he loves them and chooses them.

Why don't we just take this to ourselves and put the me word in there instead of the them word. He loves me and he chooses me knowing in advance that I'm going to fail him.

Knowing that I'm going to go my own way and be unfaithful to him. Knowing that I'm going to get into all sorts of bad allegiances with sin and sinners yet he still provides for me even when the only times I may take his name on my lips are to blaspheme him or laugh at him or to blame him when something I don't like happens.

[26 : 57] How could God allow that? Despite all that he comes after me in my sin and rebellion and denial he woos me and he buys me back and at what a price he knew what price that would be even before the world began.

It's called the covenant of grace my friends. The price that father and son were not just willing but eager to pay to buy me back. And if I remain true to him I enter into full restored faithful relationship with him.

I only have eyes for you Jesus. Hosea must have been beyond astonished at the plan God revealed for his life.

But what new heights must his astonishment have reached when he realised what almighty God was prepared to undergo and did undergo to bring back to buy back his own fallen fallible chosen people.

This truly is grace in action. Well the story of Hosea and Gomer covers the first three chapters of this book of Hosea.

[28 : 26] By the time he had moved from the northern kingdom to the southern kingdom Judah. He was still looking back in anguish at what his own people were doing.

And he uses another metaphor of the law courts. He uses the picture of God bringing just accusation against Israel. They weren't genuine in their approaches to God.

Their love was like the morning mist, he says, like the early Jew that disappears, chapter 6 verse 3. God desired mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings, chapter 6 verse 6.

But they were just like they had always been, verse 7 of chapter 6. As at Adam, they have broken the covenant, they have been unfaithful to me there.

But despite fallen Israel, sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind, chapter 8 verse 7, isn't it amazing how so many phrases that we are so utterly familiar with are from God's word.

[29 : 39] It's the very substance of our current language. So despite them sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind, God still loved them so tenderly, leading them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love, chapter 11 verse 4, to them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.

And then God expresses his anger against Israel in her backslidden state, and in her hypocrisy, time and time again, and judgment does come.

God's compassion shows through. Even in that, chapter 13 verse 14, that gloriously declares, I will deliver this people from the power of the grave.

I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? Excuse me, is that familiar? Look at 1 Corinthians. And then we have that final chapter we read together, where repentance and forgiveness and God's healing our waywardness and loving us freely looks towards the coming of the Messiah in whom all of this becomes possible.

But that final plea is to our wisdom, our God centered capacity to weigh up good from evil and to realize the truth and justice of judgment as well as the grace of unmerited salvation.

[31 : 23] Who is discerning? Well, let them understand the ways of the Lord are right. The righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.

That is the story of mankind from Eden to 2025. And it was acted out in Hosea's own married life in very dramatic and disturbing manner.

So, very briefly, that was the 720s BC. Move on a hundred years. The northern kingdom is long gone. And the southern kingdom has stuttered our way to judgment as well.

God's calling out for repentance and heart change, but Judah will have none of it. Jeremiah cries out in prophetic anguish as God's spokesman.

Jeremiah 9 11, I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals. I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there. And just as we see unlivable Gaza now, God then brought that judgment on Judah and her inhabitants in 605, 597 and 586 BC.

[32 : 46] God will not be mocked. Why? Why? Just why? Verse 12 of Jeremiah 9 tells us, Who is wise?

Wise enough to understand this. Who has been instructed by the Lord and can explain it? Why has the land been ruined and laid waste like a desert that no one can cross? The Lord said, It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them.

They have not obeyed me or followed my law. Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts. They have followed the bales as their ancestors taught them.

It's Samaria all over again. Samaria 2, Samaria the sequel. Well, surely after the return from exile and the providence of God, this scenario could not, would not happen again.

No. Sadly not. We have the repeated punishments of recidivist Israel, including the second century with that horror of a man in Tiochus Epiphanes before Jesus came.

[34 : 01] Then we have Jesus himself weeping over Jerusalem in Matthew 23. Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who would kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.

How often I've longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. And you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.

I tell you, you'll not see me again until you say blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. And 40 years later, 70 AD, Jerusalem was erased to the ground and appalling famine and slaughter of a million people took place at the hands of the might of Rome.

And that was Israel's reward for her infidelity and rebellion against God. But there even in Ezra's time, 450 to 460 BC or around then, that wonderful Psalm 107 was penned for the restored Israel, restored from Babylonian exile.

And the psalmist there in 107 draws several pictures, paints several cameos of God's goodness.

- [35 : 18] The pattern's the same in them all, whether desert wandering, imprisoned in darkness, suffering from all kinds of sickness, or storm tossed in the ocean. we've got people at a loss, hearing a loud clump as the penny drops about their spiritual condition.

The reasons for it, they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and the Lord brings them out of distress. If we're wise, says the psalmist, we'll take all this on board. If we're exercising our God-given capacity to separate right from wrong, good from evil, we will pay heed to these things and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord.

Because the covenant promises of the God who is love have not failed and never will fail.

How unlike us, whose promises are so superficial, and who failed and will fail every day. Tonight's message is so for each of us.

How often do we return to our sins? How often do we fail to learn? How often do we seek our own way, our own will?

- [36 : 38] How often do we worship our own bales of self and pride? Are we unaware of the history of mankind? How often do we need to be told the same message?

do we not see that judgment is inevitable where repentance is false and just words with no heart sacrifices according to the head and not the heart?

Do we not recognize the love of God that undergirds our existence all day long stretching out his hands to our disobedient and contradictory people?

people can we glimpse the immense patience of our heavenly father with us and with our nation such that he has not utterly consumed us already?

does this not drive us to our knees or are we indifferent and cold? Do we look at the cross? Do we look at the sinless son of the eternal father hanging in shame and unspeakable agony bearing my reproach?

- [37 : 49] Have our hearts become so calloused so hard that this does not move us to our core? who is wise? Do we not see the committed love of our God?

Even if no one else does let us realize these things and fall at the foot of that very cross in truest and deepest worship.

Let's pray together.